DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 226 RC 018 292

AUTHOR Baker, Victoria J.
TITLE Schooling for Self-Esteem: An Alternative Look at Parental and Pupil Views in Disadvantaged Third World Areas.
PUB DATE 15 Nov 89
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (88th, Washington, DC, November 15, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Developing Nations; Disadvantaged; *Educational Attitudes; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Parent Aspiration; Parent Attitudes; *Relevance (Education); Rural Areas; *Self Esteem; Student Attitudes; *Values
IDENTIFIERS Mexico; Senegal; Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

This paper, based on field research and a literature review, examines the beliefs about education as held by people in developing countries. Parents and students in disadvantaged third world areas value education for the sake of learning, not just to improve chances of modern-sector employment. A study in four Mexican rural schools found that when parents were asked, "What are the advantages of sending your child to school?", they most often cited reasons categorized as "education for its own sake." Similarly, a study in a Lebanese civil war setting found that despite the fact that students found no relation between education and the realities of the world, they placed a very high value on education. They viewed education as an enriching experience, desirable for enhancing one's self-esteem. Two fieldwork studies in Sri Lanka found that parents did not perceive education solely as an opportunity for their children to escape poverty. Although parents ideally wanted their children to obtain salaried jobs, they were realistic about the slim chances of getting a job. They saw education as a permanent gift that could be given to children so that they could live their lives as "good people." Another participant observation study in Senegal interviewed 32 men and women of varied age groups and social statuses. When questioned about the importance of education, all respondents said they felt education was important, and only four of the reasons given stressed that this importance was related to gaining a government job. The answers indicated a deep respect for knowledge. Dwellers of disadvantaged areas should be given every opportunity to participate in education for the sake of spreading knowledge and increasing self-esteem. (KS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED336226

SCHOOLING FOR SELF-ESTEEM: An Alternative Look at Parental and Pupil Views in Disadvantaged Third World Areas

Victoria J. Baker
Eckerd College
St. Petersburg, Florida

Paper presented at 88th Annual Meeting
of the American Anthropological Association
Washington, D.C.

Session: Schooling in Disadvantaged Areas
Chair/Organizer: Victoria J. Baker
Discussants:
Prof. Jeffrey Shultz
Profs. George and Louise Spindler

November 15, 1989

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

/ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Victoria J. Baker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

RC018292

SCHOOLING FOR SELF-ESTEEM: An Alternative Look at Parental and Pupil Views in Disadvantaged Third World Areas

"Behaviour shown by an educated person is different. Like between you and me. Even if we travelled together on the road, you will be more enlightened than me. Your eyes would be bright while mine would be dull."
Zambian parent in the Mwinilunga District (cited in W.H.M.L. Hoppers, 1980)

"I am blind, I do not know how to read. I am deaf, I do not understand the English language. I accept only two-pence for uprooting elephant grass. I get only a little for hard work. If I had been to school, I would not have ended up like this."
Illiterate Ghanaian parent (cited in J.K.A. Boakye and J. Oxenham, 1982)

"He who is uneducated lives in darkness. He who is educated lives in light. I am an unfortunate person because I did not get more schooling."
Sri Lankan village parent, cited in V.J. Baker, 1988)

"I have seen those who are educated and those who are not - and there is a great difference in their behavior. The educated ones have an enlightened view of how to live."
Senegalese village woman, 1989

Numerous reports in the literature tend to show that there is a strong economic motivation of parents in disadvantaged areas of Third World countries to send their children to school (cf. Gianotten 1980; Rao 1985; Ishumi cit. in Carr-Hill 1984; Hoppers 1980, to name a few). Gaining an education in order to escape the cycle of poverty and ignorance is indeed a driving force among many parents and a value instilled in their children, as is to be expected in regions where subsistence farming is the norm. Even in countries where education is free, the loss of a farm hand - however youthful - and buying school clothes, pens and notebooks can be considered large investments for those in disadvantaged regions.

Much is assumed by researchers about the fact that the parents and pupils want to keep an avenue open for the (remote) possibility that

independently of the school certificate (Brooke with Oxenham 1980:40). Some of the comments of the parents sound remarkably similar to those heard in my own Sri Lankan and Senegalese village studies: "If you know things, they cannot make a fool of you. If you know how to read and write, you avoid getting tricked;" or, "He (the child) might learn something and not suffer in the way we have" (Brooke with Oxenham 1980:41). The authors conclude that in the eyes of many, preparing the children to deal with the world is a more salient function of the school than qualifying them for modern-sector employment. Eighty-nine 6th-grade pupils, too, were asked why they come to school. Here again the largest percentage (35%) gave the answer 'to learn (unspecific)' with 'to continue studies' (20%) being the second most frequent response. To the question of why they think school is worthwhile, the pupils' answer was most often that 'learning is good (unspecific)' (23%), with 'it helps in communication' (19%) being given as the second most frequent answer. 'It helps to get a job' was given as response by only 12 percent (Brooke with Oxenham 1980:43-44).

Similarly, a research made by Boakye with Oxenham in six Ghanaian rural middle schools, which began with the hypothesis that pupils go to school in hopes of securing salaried modern sector work, again concluded that this is not the case. The interview responses with parents indicated that "most pupils value education for its own sake and do not see it solely as a means to a salaried or urban job;" that they do not see urban life as more desirable than the village; and that they do not show undue signs of exam orientation (Boakye and Oxenham 1982:48). Indeed, modern sector jobs were seen as less important than good manners or the general usefulness of an education in daily life (1982:29). Of the 112 pupils questioned, fewer than half really expected to get jobs (1982:50). The researchers bring forward (1982:52) the important point, however, that the differentials between the modern and traditional sectors in Ghana have been so eroded by Ghana's economic difficulties, that monetary advantages of education are no longer obvious.

Another field study among school dropouts in a Mexican village revealed that, while the parents do attach much importance to getting an

their children might be able to use education as a vehicle to a better way of life - namely, by getting a salaried, preferably white-collar or government job. Relatively few empirical studies report the findings of grassroots-level research in which the aspirations of parents and pupils are reflected. All too often, assumptions are made without anyone having bothered to ask the viewpoint of the participants. Sometimes the latter's eloquence gives insight into the great unfertilized learning potential of our fellow humans born in disadvantaged environments. A number of those studies which have questioned parents at length, including my own two participant observation studies in remote areas of Sri Lanka and Senegal, respectively, tend to show that peasants, while possessing idealism, are also realistic. They realize that their chances of entering the modern sector through education are minimal. While they hope for the best, the unsuccessful majority do not feel they have wasted time or monetary investment by going to school. The following paragraphs will cite several studies from the literature which give credence to the above, and will summarize the relevant findings of my own village research.

Findings in the literature.

A comprehensive study was made by Brooke and Oxenham of four Mexican rural schools, in which it was found that most of the groups of parents put relatively minor weight on employment as a reason for sending children to school. The parents of 88 pupils were asked, 'What are the advantages of sending your child to school?' and 'Why is it worthwhile keeping your child in school?' In answer to both these questions, by far the largest groups in all four villages (ranging between 60%-90% over the 4 villages for the first question and 40%-46% for the second question) had an answer which could be placed in the category 'for its own sake,' rather than 'for progress,' 'for work' or 'for continuing studies.' In discussions most of the parents talked of the humanizing influence of education and of the need to be able to read and write; thus these answers were categorized by the researchers as 'education for its own sake,' because they were goals which could be achieved

education in general, gaining the certificate is not their primary concern - rather learning to read, write and do arithmetic. For these parents, education is not for financial advancement, as there are no differences to be detected between the socio-economic situations of those who dropped out and those who stayed on; all are doing the same kind of work. Many parents with little education say that not having finished school is a disadvantage which they regret (Aben et al. 1984:107).

A different kind of disadvantaged area was recently researched by Maha Broum, who made a study of the attitudes, goal perceptions and educational behaviors of high school students in Lebanon: a civil war setting where daily concerns are for food, shelter and security. Having collected survey data from respondents (girls and boys) in a cluster sample of high schools, Broum concludes that Lebanese high school students do not find any relation between the education they get and the realities of the world, and they do not aspire to a high level of education (1989:1). Many of their responses, however, leave no room to doubt the very high value they place on education (Broum 1989:B and Table 5). The 296 students were asked to rank 18 different statements on a 4-point Likert scale from 'strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree.' The statements which scored the greatest number of 'strongly agree' responses were the following: "A school education is worth all the time and effort it requires" (191; 64.5%, with another 95 stating 'agree'); and "Education is an important factor in developing the country" (190; 64.1%). The most frequent responses in the 'strongly disagree' column were: "Public money spent on education in the past few years could have been spent more wisely for other purposes" (162; 54.7%) and "A person is foolish to keep on going to school if he can get a job" (144; 48.7%). To the statement, "The more education a person gets, the better he is able to enjoy life," 105 students (35.5%) responded 'strongly agree' and 116 (39.2%) said 'agree,' while only 9 (3%) strongly disagreed. Although the students agreed that "Savings spent on education are wisely invested" (124 strongly agree, 127 agree), a considerable number also agreed to the statement, "Education is of no help in getting a job today" (83 strongly agree, 125 agree). Other

statements that ranked high in agreement: "Schools encourage an individual to think for himself (122 strongly agree, 121 agree); and "A school education makes a person a better citizen" (132 strongly agree, 115 agree). Broum admits in her conclusions that it is difficult to explain the reasons why the students have expressed positive attitudes toward the value of education (189:1). I tend to think that education is viewed as an enriching experience, desirable for enhancing one's self-esteem, more than is commonly considered by researchers and planners.

Grassroots fieldwork in Sri Lanka and Senegal.

My own two fieldwork studies provided additional insight into the attitudes of parents and pupils. The first, a lengthy study in Sri Lanka (1984-1985) consisted of 16 months of participant observation in a remote dry-zone village, combined with six shorter case studies in differing types of villages in the research district, and a survey of a random sample of thirty village schools of the district. The results of this study - which investigated why some village schools are functioning more effectively than others, as well as the extent to which reciprocal school-community development takes place in disadvantaged villages - are reported elsewhere in detail (see Baker 1988a, 1988b, 1989). An unexpected finding emerged during an inquiry of what parents want and expect from schooling, and it was that insight which has led to the present paper. Namely, many Sri Lankan village parents do not perceive education solely as an opportunity for their children to climb the social ladder out of a life of poverty. When asked specifically what they ideally wanted their children to be when they grew up, most of the 35 householders with young children in the research village hoped their children would at least get a salaried government job or become a teacher (69%), with only 3 parents citing 'farmer' (8%) as the preferred future. At the same time, it is significant that as many as eight parents (23%) said they did not have a preference regarding their children's future occupation. A commonly heard comment was: "It is important that they become good citizens and lead good lives; or "They

may do anything they are capable of as long as they are good people." This same pattern was found in another six comparative case studies in the same research district, where 26 percent of the 180 parents interviewed stated spontaneously that they had no vocational preference for their children. None of the parents said they had all their hopes tied to education and the salaried job their children might get. On the contrary, most seemed to be very realistic regarding the fact that the chances of getting a job were slim. Some made it clear that they were citing their ideal aspiration, not what they really expected.

In this same Sri Lankan study, the majority of the parents expressed directly or indirectly that they think education is very important. Some were quite emphatic in their views: "Education is a permanent gift you can give your children, like land; it lasts and cannot be taken away," one said. Another: "The only thing I can give my children is education, and I'm willing to make any sacrifice to do that." Besides the general value of learning, many respondents expressed the importance of education in order that their children have a better way of life than they themselves had. "If we don't educate our children, they will remain fools like us," said one. Another example: "I can't read a bus board or newspaper; I don't want my children to have these difficulties. "Many brought out the fact that one is not so likely to be cheated at the market or by government officials if basic skills of numeracy and literacy are known. It is important to mention that not one parent said anything, even indirectly, about education being a wasted investment if it did not lead to a salaried job. None of the parents said they regretted the time they spent in school because it had not helped them in their later lives or had not been relevant.

In the summer of 1989 I did another participant observation study of education - this time in a remote Mandinka village in south central Senegal. Netteboulou has a population of about 1000 inhabitants living in 70 compounds. The villagers are proud of the fact that they have a school, dating from 1933, which has been the source throughout the years for a number of especially capable and ambitious people to leave the peasant way of life, gaining employment in government service or

business. A few have become influential in the network of friendship politics, and relative to many villages in the area, Netteboulou has witnessed some progress - in part due to the influence of its educated native sons. The school has grown, the Rural Development Society has attracted subsidized projects, the Women's Society now runs a small diesel-powered grain mill, a simple health center staffed by a government paramedic has been set up, and most recently, an incongruous looking modern telephone booth has been placed in the village square opposite the mosque, while a telephone satellite tower looms above the thatch-roofed huts. Further modern conveniences are non-existent, and the traditional lifestyle has changed very little since the founding of the village some hundred years ago.

The school presently has 186 pupils in six grades (131 boys, 55 girls, reflecting the traditional Muslim attitudes that education is less important for girls), with a director and five male teachers from other areas of the country and from different ethnic groups; none of the latter are of the village's Mandinka group. As the official language for education is French, the director and the teachers converse in that language and share a close camaraderie in their isolated post. Even though the education medium is French, however, the level of language proficiency in the six years of elementary school is low, as was reflected in the essays which I requested of the 5th and 6th graders. It is a rare student from the Netteboulou village school who is able to pass the national examination at the end of the 6th grade and continue on to high school, although there have been some shining success stories in the six and a half decades of the school's history.

The research included lengthy (1-1½-hour) half-structured interviews with 16 men and 16 women of varied age groups and social statuses ('nobles,' leather-workers, smiths, griots and 'slaves,' i.e. all of the village's caste-like groups were represented). Additionally, the teachers, the paramedic, and my local interpreter were all interviewed extensively. The 40 interviews, supplemented by school observations and pupil essays, provide a wealth of qualitative data on varied subjects: the problems and constraints facing remote schools, the question of

strict discipline and corporal punishment, education in the national versus the native language, reciprocal school-community development, the need for women to receive education, and inequities in the school system. These topics will be reported in future publications.

Several interview questions on the importance of education as seen by the village inhabitants, and their aspirations for their children, again contributed insight into the topic at hand. All respondents (the 32 men and women) said they felt education was important, and only four of the reasons given stress that this importance was related to gaining a government job. On the contrary, the answers indicate a wisdom and deep respect for knowledge. Examples: "You will have a more fulfilled life and know how to live better" (7); "You will be a better person and know how to behave" (8). A number of the incidental comments, taken straight from the interviews, are as follows: "If you are not educated, you are like an animal, you're not a full person;" "Education is the pillar of society;" "Education leads civilization in the right direction;" "You will respect your parents more;" "You will be healthier and happier;" "You cannot estimate the value of education;" "Others will respect you and you will be proud of yourself." Several parents, when asked during the interview if their children did homework, were quick to invite me to see a little table and to say that they bought extra kerosene so that their children could do their lessons in the evening.

A significant number (13; 41%) of the parents/adults mentioned spontaneously the practical value of education without alluding to paid work, such as: "You will not be dependent on anybody;" "People won't take advantage of you;" "You will be able to solve your own problems" and "look after your own interests;" write letters, take care of your business affairs, or travel. A few said you would always be able to find some kind of work, or be able to help support your relatives if you had some schooling. An additional question asked specifically what the parents' aspirations were for their children. Ten answered specifically that they hoped their children would get a job (work in the government, have a successful career, become a teacher, or be able to help themselves and their relatives). Again it is noteworthy that many had

more diffuse answers, such as "I hope they have a better life than we had" (8); "I hope they have a fulfilling life" (5). Further: "A life with more certainty is what I wish;" "That they may understand life;" or, "Whatever God gives them is enough." They were all subsequently asked if they thought education was ever a waste of time and investment. Only three said that it was a waste for some children, or for high school children who did not succeed, because of the much greater costs involved.

The foregoing examples, taken from the literature and from my own two studies made while living among villagers in remote, subsistence-farming regions, throw more light on attitudes toward schooling in disadvantaged areas. Even though education has not proven to be the miracle vehicle toward progress and economic advancement that it was once hoped to be, it contributes immeasurably to the pride and sense of worth of the learners. Schooling is prized for the sake of learning, not just earning. It is valued as a means to enjoy life and to become a better person. Viewed as such, the expansion of education and investments made in it should continue to increase, and dwellers of disadvantaged areas should be given every opportunity to participate - for the sake of spreading knowledge and increasing self-esteem.

REFERENCES

Aben, M., L. Been and A. Dijkstra (1984) **"Me quedo o me voy." Desercion escolar: causas y consecuencias**. J.L.P. Ooijens, ed. and coordinator. Colima, Mexico: Unidad de Servicios Educativos a Descentralizar.

Baker, V.J. (1988a) **The Blackboard in the Jungle: Formal Education in Disadvantaged Rural Areas. A Sri Lankan Case**. Delft: Eburon Publishers.

Baker, V.J. (1988b) Schooling and Disadvantage in Sri Lankan and Other Rural Situations. **Comparative Education** Vol.24, No.3:377-388.

Baker, V.J. (1989) Lessons from Black-Thicket Jungle: What is Feasible in Village Schools of Disadvantaged Areas? **International Review of Education** Vol.35, No.2:145-158.

Boakye, J.K.A. and J. Oxenham.(1982) **Qualifications and the Quality of Education in Ghanaian Middle Schools**. Brighton: University of Sussex, Institute of Development Studies.

Brooke, N. with J. Oxenham (1980) **The Quality of Education in Mexican Rural Primary Schools**. Brighton: University of Sussex, Institute of Development Studies.

Broum, M. (1989) A Study of the Attitudes towards the Value of Education, Perceptions of the Goals of Education, and the Educational Behaviors of High School Students in a Civil War Setting. University of Pittsburgh. Unpublished paper presented at the CIES Conference at Harvard, March-April 1989.

Gianotten, V. (1980) "Onderwijshervormingen in een boerensamenleving in Peru" ("Educational Reforms in an Agrarian Society in Peru"). Verhandeling no. 22. The Hague: CESO.

Hoppers, W.H.M.L. (1980) **Education in a Rural Society. Primary Pupils and School Leavers in Mwinilunga, Zambia**. The Hague: CESO.

Ishumi, A.G.M., cit. in R. Carr-Hill (1984) **Primary Education in Tanzania. A Review of the Research**. Education Division Documents, No. 16. Stockholm: SIDA.

Rao, S.V. (1985) **Education and Rural Development**. New Delhi: Sage Publications.